



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM IN EAST AFRICA: A QUALITATIVE  
AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RECENT RISE  
IN KENYAN VIOLENCE**

by

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June 2014

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis analyzes recent trends of transnational terrorism in East Africa. It assesses the background of domestic and international terrorist attacks in the region from 1998 to 2012. The study then quantitatively analyzes regional trends, using data drawn from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) showing dramatic increases in levels of terrorist violence from terrorist organizations like Al-Shabaab.

Based on Al-Shabaab's propaganda, conventional wisdom suggests that the recent increase in transnational terrorism in East Africa is attributable to Al-Shabaab's retaliation for countries' troop contributions to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In contrast, the analysis presented here is based on the hypothesis that a causal relationship exists between large flows of Somali refugees and increases in terrorist violence. Evidence shows that Al Shabaab operatives disguise themselves as refugees to cross borders and evade detection. Refugee populations are used as sources of recruitment and as safe havens for planning and executing terrorist attacks, particularly in Kenya.

Recommendations include: (1) intensification of information operations and human intelligence efforts, (2) strengthening of the Joint Counter Terrorism Center by establishing strategies for deterrence and disruption of transnational terror networks, and (3) coordination of regional actions for countering terrorist threats attributed to Somali refugee communities.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM.....	3
B.	PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL CAUSES .....	5
C.	ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY.....	6
II.	THEORETICAL MECHANISMS .....	7
A.	RECRUITMENT OF SOMALI REFUGEES.....	10
B.	PROXIMITY TO TARGETING OPPORTUNITIES.....	11
C.	REFUGEE CAMPS AS SAFE HAVENS.....	12
D.	ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE FROM NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES.....	13
III.	CASE STUDIES.....	17
A.	CASE I: ATTACK ON WESTGATE SHOPPING MALL ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2013 .....	17
1.	Perpetration, Scale, and Impact of the Attack.....	19
2.	Empirical Evidence Relevant to Theory and Hypothesis ...	20
B.	CASE II: ATTACK ON GARISSA CHURCHES ON JULY 1, 2012 ...	23
1.	Perpetration, Scale, and Impact of the Attack.....	24
2.	Empirical Evidence Relevant to Theory and Hypothesis ...	25
C.	CASE III: ATTACK ON A BUS IN EASTLEIGH SUBURB ON NOVEMBER 18, 2012.....	29
1.	Perpetration, Scale, and Impact of the Attack.....	30
2.	Empirical Evidence Relevant to Theory and Hypothesis ...	32
D.	CASE IV: ATTACK ON A NAIROBI BUS TERMINAL ON MARCH 10, 2012 .....	33
1.	Perpetration, Scale, and Impact of the Attack.....	34
2.	Empirical Evidence Relevant to Theory and Hypothesis ...	36
IV.	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	39
A.	CONCLUSION .....	39
B.	RECOMMENDATIONS .....	40
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	41
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	47

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Terrorist Attacks in East Africa, 1998 to 2012 (from GTD, 2012). .....	2
Figure 2.	Domestic and International Terrorism in Kenya, 1998 to 2012 (from GTD, 2012).....	2
Figure 3.	Location of Eastleigh in the Kenyan Capital Nairobi (from Google, 2014). .....	8
Figure 4.	Cache of Arms Recovered in Eastleigh on September 14, 2012 (from Capital FM).....	9
Figure 5.	Trend of Refugee Influx in East Africa; 2007–2013 (from UNHCR, 2013). .....	14
Figure 6.	Somali Refugee Influx as of May 2013 (from UNHCR, 2013).....	15
Figure 7.	Westgate Mall Explosion on September 23, 2013 (from The Independent@UK, 2014).....	18
Figure 8.	Kenyan Map Showing Locations of Dadaab Refugee Complex and Town of Garissa (from AFP, 2012).....	25
Figure 9.	Attack Scene inside African Inland Church in Garissa on July 1, 2012 (from NTV, 2012).....	26
Figure 10.	Location of Church Attacks in Garissa on July 1, 2012 (from Nation.com, 2012). .....	27
Figure 11.	Eastleigh's Public Transportation Area (from Business Daily Africa, 2012). .....	30
Figure 12.	The Scene of a Minibus Attack in Eastleigh, November 18, 2012 (from Reuters, 2012). .....	33
Figure 13.	The Machakos Public Bus Station in Nairobi City (from <i>Sabahi</i> , 2012). .....	35
Figure 14.	Kenyan Police and Security Officials Handling a Casualty (from AP, 2011). .....	38

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	AMISOM Military Strength as of January 2014 (from AMISOM website, 2014). .....	3
Table 2.	Influx of Somali Refugees in Kenya for the Study Period (from UNHCR, 2013). .....	6

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Agence France-Presse
AIC	African Inland Church
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AP	Associated Press
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAR	Central African Republic
DA	Defense Analysis
DOD	Department of Defense
EAC	East African Community
EAJCTC	East Africa Joint Counter Terrorism Center
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
GLR	Great Lakes Region
HIPS	Heritage Institute for Policy Studies
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IDP	Internally Displaced Peoples
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IGPO	International Graduate Programs Office
KDF	Kenyan Defense Forces
MSF	Spanish Me'decins Sans Frontieres
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
START	Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
SNA	Somalia National Army
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
UPF	Uganda Police Force
USMC	United States Marine Corps

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### **Disclaimer**

The conceptual ideas, views, and opinions expressed in this study are accredited to the author, and they do not represent the official position of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF)

### **Dedication**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of terrorist violence within East African countries, particularly in Kenya and Uganda. For instance, as early as 1980, the Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi was bombed, leaving 15 people dead. Nzes (2012) recalls that “an Arab group claimed responsibility for the bombing, saying it was a revenge for Kenya allowing Israeli troops to refuel in Nairobi during the raid on Uganda’s Entebbe Airport in 1976.” However, in the recent past, we have witnessed substantial changes in terrorist activities across the region. In particular, according to quantitative data derived from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), it is evident that international terrorism has increased significantly in Kenya in recent years, far more so than it has in other East African countries. The epicenter of this thesis therefore focuses on an analysis and explanation of Kenya’s terrorism over the period from 1998 to 2012.

East Africa's terrorism trend for the period from 1998 to 2012 shows that from 1998 to 2009, Kenya experienced relatively low levels of terrorism compared to the rest of the region, and generally registered more domestic terrorist attacks than international attacks. In contrast, between 2010 and 2012, Kenya experienced far higher levels of terrorism than the other countries in the region, and most of the attacks were launched by transnational groups. As a result, out of the 176 total attacks that Kenya experienced between 1998 and 2012, 155 (88.1 percent) were international rather than domestic in origin. Therefore, the main puzzle for this research is why Kenya experienced such a rapid increase in international terrorist attacks since 2010, while other countries have registered comparably fewer attacks in the same time period. Although this study focuses on Kenya, analysis of the findings will be strategically resourceful and applicable to other countries. Figure 1 shows the regional terrorism trend, and Figure 2 shows the trend between domestic and international terrorist attacks in Kenya. (Data for Figures 1 and 2 were derived from the GTD and constructed qualitatively using R-Studio.)

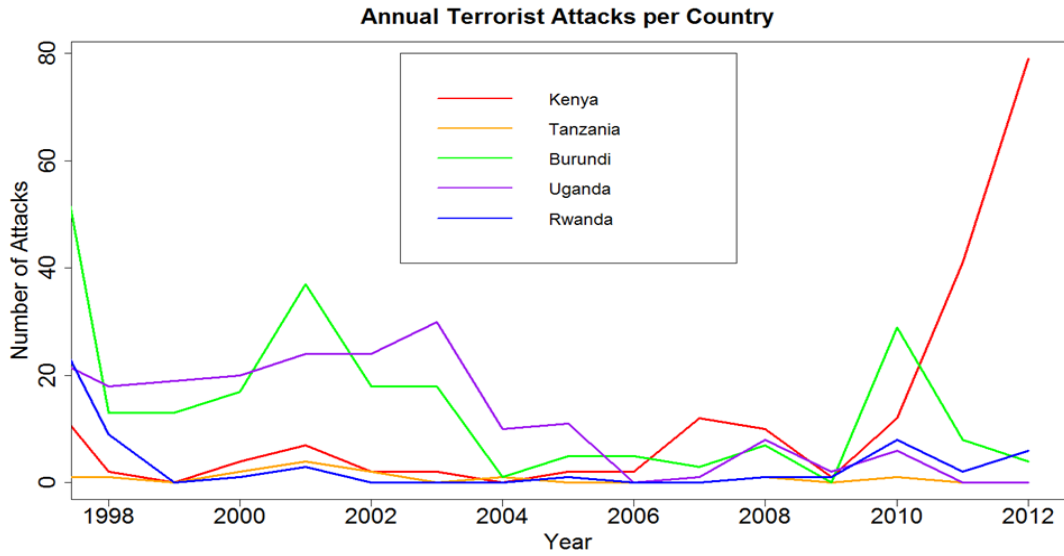


Figure 1. Terrorist Attacks in East Africa, 1998 to 2012 (from GTD, 2012).

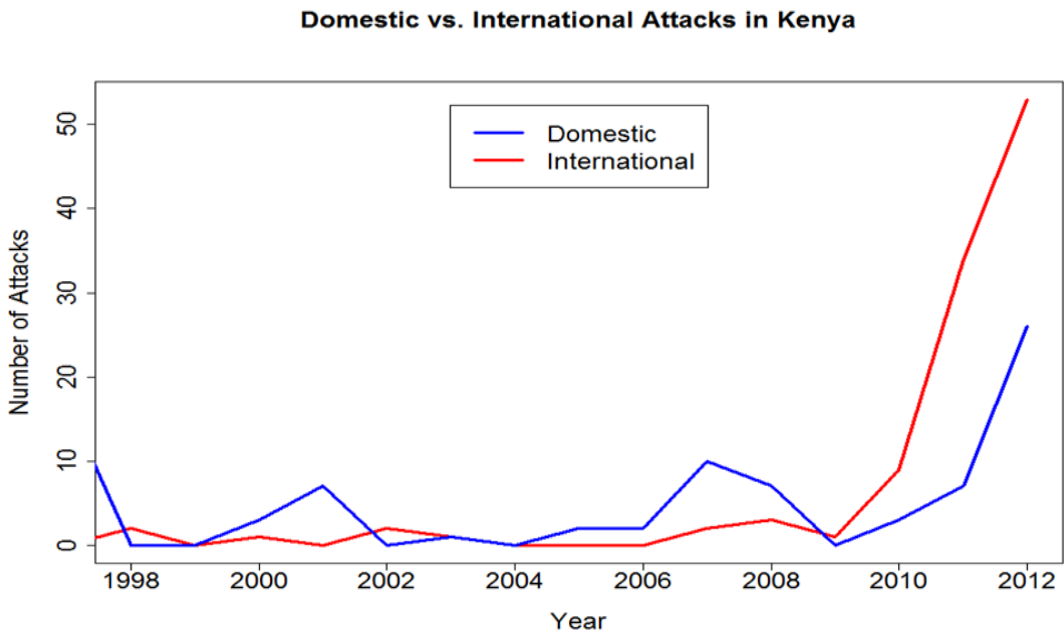


Figure 2. Domestic and International Terrorism in Kenya, 1998 to 2012 (from GTD, 2012).

## A. THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Various theories may be associated with the huge spike in the number of terrorist attacks in Kenya. For instance, several media reports have consistently propagated negative propaganda from Somalia's Islamist militant group, Al Shabaab, suggesting that countries contributing troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to fight the group are more vulnerable to transnational terrorist attacks orchestrated by that very group in retaliation for these countries' military involvement in Somalia. Allison (2013, p. 1) reports that

unlike Uganda's internationally approved military support for Somalia's fragile central government (along with Burundi, Djibouti, and Sierra Leone), Kenya's was a unilateral intervention. Despite subsequent UN legitimacy, Kenya's intervention in Somalia was essentially an invasion, and the risk of revenge was always going to be high.

Although the propaganda argument sounds outwardly convincing, it may not be wholly true. It is worth noting that ever since AMISOM's inception in 2007, Burundi and Uganda have contributed more troops than Kenya, and are widely perceived by Al Shabaab as invaders, yet they experienced fewer attacks over the same period. Table 1 shows AMISOM military strength as of January 2014.

CONTINGENT	NUMBER OF TROOPS
Burundi	5,432
Djibouti	1,000
Ethiopia	4,395
Kenya	3,664
Sierra Leone	850
Uganda	6,223
Force Headquarters	81
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,645</b>

Table 1. AMISOM Military Strength as of January 2014 (from AMISOM website, 2014).

This study will specifically analyze and explain Kenya's high level of international terrorism with particular reference to the influx of Somali refugees and the existence of a strong Somali business and local community. The author hypothesizes that the Islamist militant group Al Shabaab has taken advantage of refugees to establish, plan, and operationalize terrorist cells for attacking high value targets, mainly in Kenya and Uganda. Similarly, the United States' Country Reports on Terrorism (2011, p. 16) note that "arms smuggling, reports of extremist recruiting within refugee camps and Kenyan cities, and increased allegations of terrorist plotting, have enhanced recognition among government officials and civil society that Kenya has remained vulnerable to terrorist attacks." It is worth noting that the time period of 2010 to 2012, when Kenya registered a spike in the number of terrorist attacks, coincided with the time period when Al Shabaab was officially affiliated to Al Qaeda, and had thereby gained significant reinforcement of foreign fighters to its rank and file purposely to foster and strengthen Al Qaeda's doctrine, ideology, and targeting strategy. For instance, the terrorist attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, was planned and executed by a cell of Al Shabaab's foreign fighters, who are believed to have disguised themselves as refugees and entered Kenya from neighboring Somalia. START (2013, p. 3) reports that "between 2008 and 2012, 65 percent of all terrorist attacks in Kenya are attributed to Al-Shabaab."

The author hypothesizes that Al Shabaab operatives may often take advantage of refugee status to freely diffuse into Kenyan Somali communities from where they clandestinely recruit, plan, and establish terrorist franchise cells with freedom of movement and action for targeting opportunities. The use of refugee camps was noted by Nzes (2012) who observed that, "on October 13, 2011, suspected Al-Shabaab militants kidnapped two female Spanish Me'decins Sans Frontieres (MSF) aid workers from Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, and took them to Somalia."

There are substantial Muslim populations in many Kenyan cities, the majority of which are of Somali descent, and who are therefore prone to

radicalization by Islamist extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Al-Qaeda in East Africa. “Many Muslims in Kenya also live in Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi. Eastleigh is often called ‘Little Mogadishu,’ and is almost home to Somali refugees who, over the years, have fled the violence and instability in their home country” (Nzes, 2012).

## **B. PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL CAUSES**

According to prior research by other authors, there are factors that could explain the problems and causes associated with transnational terrorism in Kenya. Some of the factors directly explain the causes of terrorist attacks, and other factors explain facilitation of the attacks. Otiso (2009, p. 111) observes that “Kenya is a good target of global terrorism because of the combination of geographical, regional, historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural factors.” These factors include the following:

The country’s close ties with Israeli and Western countries; its vibrant coastal beach tourism industry that is at odds with the locally dominant Islamic religion and culture; the perception that the country’s predominantly Christian population is an obstacle to Islamization of East Africa; its strategic geographical location relative to Europe, Asia, and neighboring African countries; porous borders; unstable neighboring countries especially Somalia and South Sudan; relatively open and multicultural society; relatively large Muslim population; the political and socio-economic deprivation of the coastal population relative to the rest of the country.

These factors are constant, and therefore, cannot explain variations over time, particularly the recent increase in terrorism. While the factors mentioned above may have been important causes of terrorism in Kenya before 2010, other situational and circumstantial factors, such as the influx of Somali refugees and military involvement in Somalia, may offer better explanations for the causes of the rapid increase of transnational terrorism in Kenya after 2010. The numbers presented in Table 2 demonstrate that the number of Somali refugees in Kenya grew rapidly in the last few years, just as violence levels were increasing. This

shows that there seems to be at least a correlation between these two variables. Chapter II will explore the causal connection in more detail.

COUNTRY	YEAR	NUMBER OF REFUGEES	PERCENTAGE RATE OF INFLUX
KENYA	2007	199,570	
	2008	242,700	21.6
	2009	352,720	45.3
	2010	385,000	9.2
	2011	479,000	24.4
	2012	546,320	14.0
	2013	492,046	9.9

Table 2. Influx of Somali Refugees in Kenya for the Study Period (from UNHCR, 2013).

### C. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, the author has described the main research puzzle by counter-arguing the conventional wisdom that countries that contribute more troops to AMISOM are vulnerable to retaliatory terrorist attacks by Al-Shabaab. The author has hypothesized that the influx of Somali refugees is the main cause of rapid increase in terrorist violence in Kenya. Using quantitative charts derived from the GTD database, the author illustrates the level of terrorist violence in East Africa from 1998 to 2012. Chapter II will introduce the theoretical mechanisms relative to the research hypothesis, and it will expound on relevant evidence from neighboring countries. Chapter III will discuss four terrorist attacks as case studies focusing on the scale, perpetration, and impact of each attack. The relevancy of available empirical evidence to support the research theory and hypothesis will be emphasized for each case. Consequently, the author will suggest recommendations for future policies aimed at deterrence, disruption, and defeat of transnational terror networks which are supported by Somali refugee communities in East Africa.



## **II. THEORETICAL MECHANISMS**

This chapter explains how the influx of Somali refugees may be connected to the recent increase of terrorism in Kenya. There are three reasons that we might expect there to be a causal connection between refugees and terrorism: 1) terrorists can recruit other terrorists from the Kenyan Somali refugee and business communities, 2) refugees and refugee camps offer accessibility to targeting opportunities, and 3) refugee camps give safe havens for terrorists' sanctuary and freedom of action. In Kenya, Somali refugees are particularly notable because some of the Somali refugees were integrated into Kenyan cities where they established local businesses, but most of them lived in predominantly Somali-Kenyan communities.

Since the resurgence of Al Shabaab in the fall of 2006, and subsequent inception of AMISOM in January 2007, Kenya has experienced an abrupt surge in the influx of refugees who fled the fighting between the Islamist militants and the Somali National Army (SNA) supported by AMISOM. Consequently, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) established and commissioned Dadaab refugee camp in North-Eastern Kenya. At the same time, some Kenyan cities experienced a boom in their Somali refugee populations. For instance, in the Eastleigh suburb of Nairobi, the oldest Somali-Kenyan refugee and business community has received and accommodated greater numbers of Somali refugee families. The heavily congested, but commercially busy slum of Eastleigh, also nicknamed 'little Mogadishu' could represent a strategic safe haven for terrorists, both in terms of recruitment and targeting opportunities. Figure 3 shows the location of Eastleigh suburb near Nairobi city.



Figure 3. Location of Eastleigh in the Kenyan Capital Nairobi (from Google, 2014).

As the Somali refugee population skyrocketed in Kenya between 2007 and 2012, it was evident that the level of violence stemming from Somali refugee communities escalated as well and thus compelled the Kenyan security agencies to intervene accordingly. Unfortunately, Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2013a, p. 3) reported that “Kenyan security force abuses in 2009, 2010, and 2012 included: torture, rape, and other serious forms of violence against Somali Kenyans and Somali refugees throughout Kenya’s predominantly Somali inhabited North-Eastern region.”

The Eastleigh suburb is Nairobi’s most chaotic and violent community, and is often marred by riots and sectarian violence. The nature and level of violence is similar to the Somali capital Mogadishu before it was fully liberated by AMISOM and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces in 2011. The liveliness, business enterprises, and clan rivalries in the Bakara market of Mogadishu are seemingly replicated in the trade and business dynamics in Eastleigh.

Deadly riots caused by ethnic and sectarian divisions in the Eastleigh suburb are often ignited by rivalries between informal groups of indigenous Somali-Kenyans and extremist factions of ethnic Somalis as they struggle to compete for scarce but lucrative business opportunities. Many local businesses in the suburb are directly managed or indirectly owned by ethnic Somalis who lived and worked in the diaspora areas of Europe, Asia, and North America for the past two decades. Nevertheless, persistent riots in Eastleigh often escalate into terrorist violence which occasionally spreads beyond the suburb to other parts of Nairobi city. This supports the notion that most of the terrorist violence is orchestrated by Somali refugees who make up more than 90 percent of Eastleigh's population. The perpetrators of the terrorist violence seem to have a wider agenda when using Eastleigh as a stepping stone to execute missions of launching targeted terrorist attacks in Nairobi's administrative and business centers. Capital Reporter (2012, p. 1) notes that "police in Nairobi thwarted what would have been a deadly terror attack in the city after they recovered a cache of deadly terror weapons and arrested two suspects of Somali origin at a house in Eastleigh area." Figure 4 shows a sample of the recovered weapons.



Figure 4. Cache of Arms Recovered in Eastleigh on September 14, 2012 (from Capital FM).

## **A. RECRUITMENT OF SOMALI REFUGEES**

Kenya accommodates the majority of the Somali refugee population in East Africa, but the Somali community maintains deep socio-cultural divisions with the Kenyan population. Some of the differences may be drawn along religion, governance, and socio-economic structure. For instance, whereas most Kenyans are Christians, Somalis are predominantly Muslim, and whereas Kenyans have experienced more than four decades of democratic governance, Somalis have a long background of political turmoil, military dictatorship, and lawlessness.

The lengthy absence of central democratic governance in Somalia between 1990 and 2012 triggered the resurgence of several clan based and religiously inspired terrorist groups such as Al Shabaab, which recently gained the capacity to operate beyond Somalia's borders. Being host to many Somali refugees and a full-fledged democracy, Kenya is an obvious target of radical Islamic militant groups for recruitment, training, planning, and subsequent attacks on high-value targets. Publically available information and credible media reports indicate that high profile members of the al-Qaeda affiliate Al Shabaab are actively recruiting Somali Kenyans and Somali refugees from parts of Kenya and refugee camps in particular. Kouri (2014, p. 1) reports that

law enforcement and security officials are eager to arrest Abdikadir Mohamed Abdikadir, a/k/a 'Ikrima' a Kenyan citizen born in Mombasa, and known for recruiting young Kenyans for Al Shabaab's Kenyan Islamists in Somalia.

The Kenyan security agencies stepped up cross-border operations along the Somalia border to counter any possible human trafficking of recruits and trained fighters across the two countries' common border. Nevertheless, Al Shabaab's operatives and recruiters take advantage of Kenya and Somalia's direct access to the Indian Ocean. The Kenyan Navy and Coast Guard are not logistically equipped to sustain consistent maritime surveillance and routine

security operations along the coastline; this constraint offers terrorists and recruiters freedom of entry and exit. Anzalone (2012, p. 1) attests that

Since 2007, Al-Shabaab has recruited hundreds of foreign fighters; the bulk of non-Somali foreign fighters, probably came from East African countries, and was recruited by Al-Shabaab's regional allies, such as Kenya Muslim Youth Center (MYC).

The situation of maritime insecurity is even worse along Somalia's coastline on the Gulf of Eden and the Indian Ocean. Despite efforts and support by the international maritime joint task force, the Somali pirates continue to aggressively coordinate and facilitate transportation of people, guns, and money for Al Shabaab to and from Yemen and other friendly countries in the Arabian Peninsula and from Kenya as well. Mann (2013, p. 2) observes that

Al Shabaab has been conducting raids, small scale attacks, smuggling operations, and fundraising inside Kenya, and has also aggressively sought to recruit new membership from Kenya's roughly 2.4 million ethnic Somalis, in Kenya's North Eastern Province, and there are worries about potential for radicalization among the roughly 500,000 Somali refugees in Kenya.

## **B. PROXIMITY TO TARGETING OPPORTUNITIES**

Recently, transnational terrorists in East Africa demonstrated a high level of planning, sophistication, and effectiveness in terms of target sourcing and selection. Al-Shabaab's foreign fighters, who are largely responsible for the recent surge of transnational terrorist violence in Kenya, often utilize the opportunity of possible cover and concealment offered by Somali refugee communities to infiltrate into Kenya's cities and mainland for initial target reconnaissance and subsequent attacks. Otiso (2009, p. 114) observes that

Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda have both managed to infiltrate cross-border refugee traffic and some Somali refugee camps in Kenya's North Eastern Province and have made their way into Somali dominated neighborhoods in Nairobi and Mombasa, and from these convenient hideouts, these terror groups have been able to map their targets and mount terror attacks.

Being densely populated and highly congested, the Somali dominated neighborhood of Eastleigh offers a potential for clandestine recruitment, training, and logistical facilitation for terror attacks.

### **C. REFUGEE CAMPS AS SAFE HAVENS**

The final theoretical mechanism presented here is that refugee camps will be used by terrorists as safe havens where terrorists can easily access, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit, train, transit, and operate freely and securely due to weak or inadequate governance. According to the *Arab Times* (2013, p.1), the Kenyan interior minister publicly decried the senseless terrorist violence perpetrated by some Somali refugees, yet a considerable number of them are not legally documented by Kenyan immigration department as refugees. He stressed the fact that

for many years, Kenya has been host to the largest refugee community in the world with almost 600,000 refugees; some of these refugees have abused our hospitality and kindness to plan and launch terror attacks from safety of refugee camps.

The minister's comments came in the wake of a terrorist attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, and Kenya's decision to repatriate Somali refugees back to their country. He further emphasized that "Somali refugee camps were being used as a safe haven for Islamist militants and the time had come for hundreds of thousands of refugees to go home" (*Arab Times*, 2013, p. 2).

The notion of refugee camps being used as terrorist safe havens is neither new nor unique on the global scene. Some countries in the Middle East experienced similar situations, which were widely generated by a resurgence of radical Islamic militancy and international terrorism. For instance, the U.S Department of State (2011) reports that "Palestinian refugee camps were also used as safe havens by Palestinian armed groups and are used to house weapons and shelter wanted criminals." Similarly, the current political turmoil and civil conflict in South Sudan has displaced many people, and the majority of them

have sought refuge in Northern Uganda. According to Uganda's security agencies and media reports, some of the undocumented Sudanese refugees are already on a rampage of ruthless armed robbery and terrorist violence in Uganda (UPF, 2014).

With increased vigilance and mounted pressure by Kenyan law enforcement and security agencies to counter terrorist violence in refugee camps, Al Shabaab militants have shifted tactics from seeking safe havens in refugee camps to other areas considered safer and more conducive for the transit of terrorists' weaponry and recruits to and from Somalia. The Daily Nation (2013, p. 2) reported that

Mohammed Seif confessed to police that he transported more than two dozen grenades from Somalia to Nairobi through the Kitui game reserve. The new revelation raises concerns that the game reserves are used as terrorist safe havens.

Consequently, the Kenyan police have particularly embarked on routine surveillance of the semi-porous Somali-Kenya border, which some Al-Shabaab agents periodically exploited for clandestine entry to, and exit from, refugee camps located on the Kenyan side of the border. Relatedly, Momanyi (2013, p. 1) reported that "twenty-one Somali refugees were arrested and charged after police intercepted them at the Somali border while headed from a camp in Kenya to join an Al-Shabaab training base."

#### **D. ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE FROM NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES**

Kenya and Uganda have a long history and good reputations for hosting Somali refugees from 1990 to 2013; whereas Burundi and Rwanda have barely hosted any Somali refugees, and Tanzania hosted very few refugees, who were repatriated in 2013 after Somalia attained democratic governance. Other countries beyond East Africa also host a significant number of Somali refugees. According to data obtained from the United Nations Humanitarian Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), out of 1.015 million Somali refugees hosted in East Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula as of May 2013,

48.4 percent of them are hosted in other countries outside East Africa as follows: Djibouti (1.8 percent), Ethiopia (23.6 percent), Eritrea (0.34 percent), and Yemen (22.6 percent). 51.6 percent of the 1.015 million Somali refugees have been hosted in East African countries as follows: Kenya (48.5 percent), Uganda (2.9 percent), and Tanzania (0.2 percent).

Although 1.015 million ethnic Somalis sought refuge in neighboring countries, 1.106 million sought refuge within Somalia. They dwell in Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camps, and are administered by the Somali government supported by the United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR. Thus, out of an approximate 2.12 million Somali refugees, 52.1 percent of them have sought refuge within Somalia, and are sheltered in three provinces: Puntland (6.1 percent), Somaliland (4.0 percent), and South/Central (42.1 percent). Figure 5 illustrates the trend of Somali refugee influx in East Africa from 2007 to 2013.

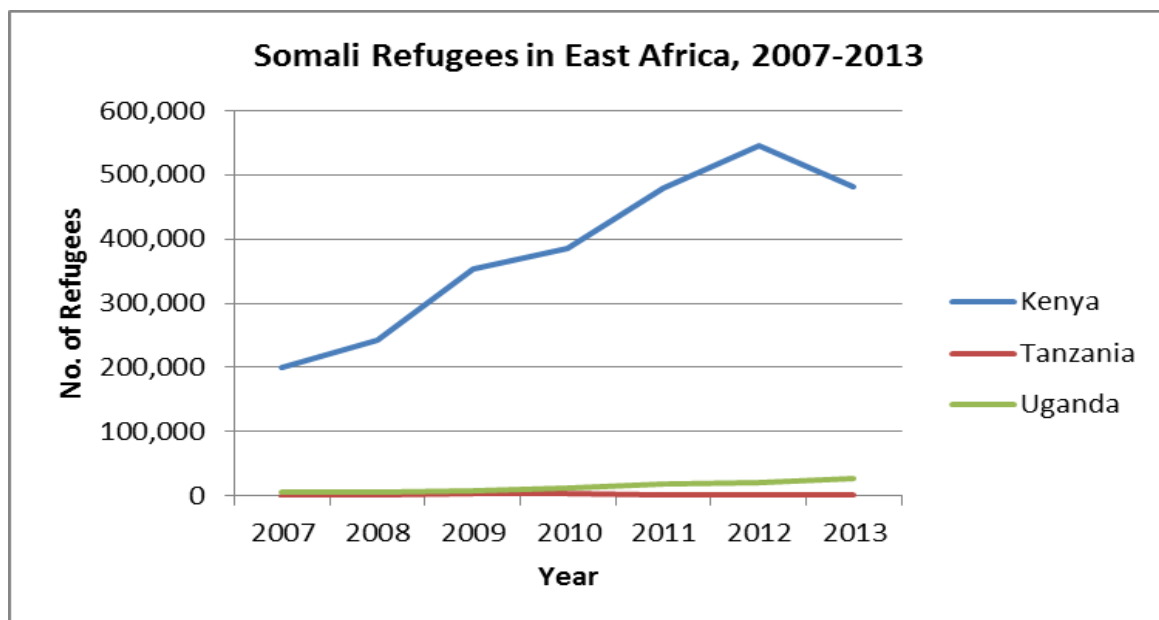


Figure 5. Trend of Refugee Influx in East Africa; 2007–2013 (from UNHCR, 2013).



The Somali refugee trend in East Africa clearly shows that Kenya hosted more refugees than all her neighbors. The trend further suggests that Kenya hosted many Somali refugees well before 2007, which partly explains why Kenya currently has such a large population of Somali Kenyans. It is also important to note that Kenya experienced sectarian violence and insecurity purportedly engineered by Somali refugees even before 2007. As Aronson (2011, pp. 1–2) attests

President Daniel Arap Moi instituted a policy in 2001 that officially closed the Kenya-Somali border. Moi exclaimed that, “although Kenya showed hospitality by accommodating refugees from Somalia, they [refugees] abused their welcome by bringing illegal firearms into the country.”

Figure 6 shows the geographical distribution of the total and influx of Somali refugees in neighboring countries as of May 2013.

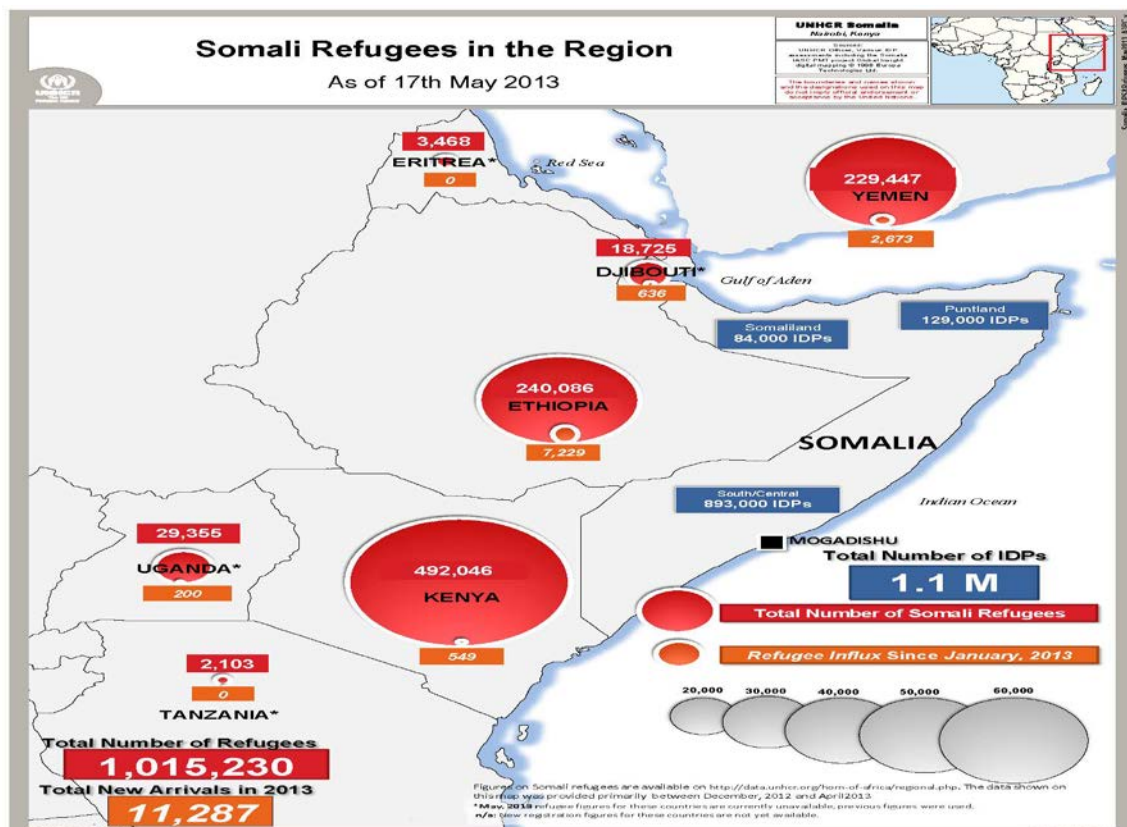


Figure 6. Somali Refugee Influx as of May 2013 (from UNHCR, 2013).

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### **III. CASE STUDIES**

In this chapter, the author discusses four of the six largest terrorist attacks in Kenya since 2007. Each attack will be described in detail, with particular emphasis on the role that refugees and refugee camps played in the attacks. In particular: (1) the September 21, 2013, siege of Westgate mall in Nairobi; (2) the July 1, 2012, Garissa church attacks near Dadaab refugee camp; (3) the November 18, 2012, attack on a public bus in Eastleigh Suburb; and (4) the March 10, 2012, attack on a bus terminal in Nairobi city. For each attack, this study analyzes the empirical evidence relevant to the theory and hypothesis presented above.

#### **A. CASE I: ATTACK ON WESTGATE SHOPPING MALL ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2013**

The attack and subsequent siege of Westgate mall is by far the biggest terrorist attack in Kenya since the 1998 U.S. embassy bombing at the heart of Nairobi city. Even though the location of Westgate shopping mall is not in proximity to any Somali refugee camp or Somali-Kenyan community, the author believes—based on the availability of credible evidence—that regardless of the scale of the attack, its perpetration could be well linked to Somali refugee communities. Hence, this case is relevant to the research theory and hypothesis. Availability of relevant empirical evidence could further justify and support the author's belief. Most likely, the attackers targeted Westgate shopping mall for a variety of tactical and strategic reasons. Westgate shopping mall is a one-stop center in terms of service delivery, implying that the 68 lives that were lost during the attack were most likely from diverse origins and different nationalities.

The Westgate shopping complex is an upscale market located in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, at approximately 1.2 miles north of the city center. The shopping complex is particularly popular with indigenous as well as foreign customers, who are normally attracted to the world class businesses and recreational services

readily accessible at Westgate. A significant number of Westgate's domestic clientele is comprised of well-educated and fully employed Kenyan professionals who work for corporate firms, government ministries, and non-governmental organizations. The majority of Westgate's foreign customers include expatriate employees of various diplomatic missions and international organizations accredited to Kenya. Figure 7 is a view of the explosion at Westgate shopping mall on September 23, 2013. The gruesome attack and subsequent siege of the mall by Islamic militants seemed to have totally surprised Kenya's security and intelligence apparatus.



Figure 7. Westgate Mall Explosion on September 23, 2013 (from The Independent@UK, 2014).

The environment and shopping experience at Westgate portrays Kenya's anticipated economic transition from third world to first world, and this could be the reason why the upscale shopping complex is popular amongst foreign nationals, expatriates, diplomats, and tourists from Asia, Europe, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Bruton (2013, p. 5) notes that "Nairobi is East Africa's most prosperous hub, full of Western tourists, business interests, aid operations, and diplomats; the Westgate mall attack could

have killed shoppers from any corner of the globe.” It may be against this background that the Westgate mall qualified as a high-value target for radical Islamic militants, whose extremist ideology and socio-cultural beliefs vehemently oppose and seek to challenge the modernity of a secular and Western-oriented culture, which is considerably predominant in the East African region. For instance, in a deliberate attempt to avoid Muslim casualties during the mall siege, the attackers openly segregated amongst their hostages by freeing those who ably identified themselves as Muslims; as Howden (2013, p. 2) reported, “The heavily armed militants were separating Muslims from non-Muslims and killing scores of weekend shoppers.”

### **1. Perpetration, Scale, and Impact of the Attack**

At least 67 innocent lives were lost in this single attack and more than 150 shoppers sustained injuries. Although no group has officially declared responsibility for the attack, it is widely accepted that most of the attackers were Al-Shabaab foreign fighters. However, it is worth noting that the uniqueness, targeting strategy, and nature of the Westgate attack caused enormous suspicion as to whether Al-Shabaab still had the capacity to plan and execute such a high profile cross-border attack using a very different tactical approach from what is generally perceived of the Somali-based militant group. Before the spectacular and fatal Westgate mall attack, the other large scale cross-border attack by Al-Shabaab was the July 2010 twin bombing of a popular sports bar and restaurant in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, where the group’s tactical assault on the targets was achieved by accurate and prompt use of suicide bombers. Similarly, START (2013, p. 4) observes that “to date, the attack at Westgate mall is Al-Shabaab’s only recorded hostage-barricade attack, in which perpetrators occupy a location and hold hostages on site rather than abducting them.”

The different tactical approach employed by the militants who attacked the Westgate mall made it difficult for security analysts to authoritatively confirm that Al-Shabaab was the actual perpetrator of the attack, contrary to the group’s

media claims. However, as events unfolded and investigations on the attack intensified, the Kenyan police obtained circumstantial and situational evidence linking some refugees in Kenyan camps to terrorists in Somalia. This compelled the police to implement a series of drastic security measures aimed at prohibiting Al-Shabaab's foreign operatives from using Somali refugee camps as safe havens for terrorist activities in Kenya. To this end, Momanyi (2013, p. 1) reported that "Police stepped up security surveillance at the Kenya-Somalia boarder and in refugee camps after it emerged that terror attacks are plotted at the camps, including the September 21 attack at the Westgate shopping mall."

Since the Westgate mall siege, the Kenyan government has adopted a tough stance against illegal immigrants. For instance, a series of grenade attacks in Nairobi city in the fall of 2013, rekindled the memories of the Westgate mall attack, prompting the Kenyan police to focus on pursuit of illegal immigrants, especially undocumented ethnic Somalis. Wabala (2014, p. 1) reports that "some 82 Somalis arrested in the ongoing operation in Eastleigh have been deported back to Mogadishu." On a similar note, Deutsche Welle (2014, p. 1) reports that

three blasts in Eastleigh on March 31 that killed six people appear to have triggered the latest police crackdown, although frequent swoops on Somalis have been taking place since last September's deadly siege of the Westgate shopping mall for which Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility.

## **2. Empirical Evidence Relevant to Theory and Hypothesis**

From the day of the attack, a joint task force of security analysts, forensic experts, Interpol, and law enforcement agencies comprised of American, British, Israeli, and Kenyan counterterrorism officials has worked to find credible evidence to authoritatively link the Westgate mall attack to any regional and/or international terrorist organization. However, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) office in Nairobi, Kenya, the investigation was derailed because none of the four militants survived the attack; the remains of the three bodies recovered in the rubble were severely disfigured and not in good enough condition to support any forensic investigation. An excerpt from an interview with

Dennis Brady titled “On the Ground in Kenya, Terror at the Westgate Mall,” conducted on January 10, 2014, by the FBI, demonstrates these limitations. The interviewee is the bureau’s legal attaché in Nairobi, Kenya:

*Qn: Where Does the Investigation Stand Now?*

*Brady:* The Kenyans have charged four individuals in connection with the terror attack, and the case is moving through the court process. The four are directly connected to individuals who physically carried out the attack. Nobody is under the impression that we have fully identified the entire network in this attack, however, that is why the investigation continues.

In terms of the hypothesis of this study, it is worth noting that the four individuals who were arrested and charged by Kenyan courts are all ethnic Somalis. After a thorough investigation by Kenyan police and subsequent cross examination by the court, some of them were found to have entered into Kenya illegally by disguising themselves as refugees and deliberately evading the documentation procedure of the Kenyan immigration department. Al Jazeera news (2013, p. 2) reported that

a court ordered four men, Mohammed Ahmed Abdi, Liban Abdi Omar, Hussein Hassan Mustafah, and Aden Dheq, imprisoned until the next court hearing. None are accused of being gunmen in the mall; Abdi Omar and Mustafah were charged with knowingly supporting the attackers, entering Kenya illegally, and obtaining false identification documents. Dheq was accused of harboring someone authorities say is a senior Al-Shabaab leader.

One of the two men (Abdi Omar) charged by the Kenyan court for knowingly supporting the Westgate mall attackers had confessed through a narrative posted online immediately after the attack. If Omar’s narrated confession is authentic, the Kenyan court would derive resourceful details from the narrative, and the details could provide credible evidence on the perpetrators. In particular, in Omar’s narrated confession he mentions that some Somali Islamic fighters who once served as Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) soldiers had good connections with the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in Somalia long before the Westgate attack.

Until the fall of 2008, Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam formed the militant wing of the Islamic Courts Union whose leader Sheik Sherrif Ahmed soon became Somalia's second President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in February 2009, supported by the United Nations, United States of America, European Union, and African Union. Upon Sheik Sherrif's acceptance to lead the TFG, the militant wing of the then ICU refused to be part of TFG, hence the resurgence of a stronger Al-Shabaab to fight the TFG and its international allies. Omar (2013, p. 2) narrates

when KDF went to fight in Somalia, I was in Kenya. I had already asked to leave KDF. I stayed for over one year in Mombasa. Al Shabaab was paying fighters very good money for killings and for kidnappings. Most fighters were from Afmadow but some lived in Mombasa. The ones in Kenya were organized by Habib Gani who later left Kenya and went to fight in Somalia. In May this year 2013, I received a call from a person who said he was with me in KDF. He wanted me to help them. It was strange because KDF has so many fighters and at this time, several Islamic fighters were kidnapped and killed.

Omar's assertion that "most fighters were from Afamadow but some lived in Mombasa" provides further evidence of the causal connection between refugee populations and terrorist violence in Kenya. It seems likely that the Islamic fighters from Afamadow, Somalia, entered Kenya disguised as refugees, and established a safe haven in the Somali-Kenyan Community in Mombasa. It also seems reasonable to suppose that some of the surviving Somali Islamic fighters, Abdi Omar inclusive, could have teamed up to execute the Westgate mall attack on behalf of Al-Shabaab. As Omar (2013) notes, "Al-Shabaab paid fighters very good money for killings and kidnappings." Omar's online confession, if authentic, thus represents strong empirical evidence for the hypothesis presented previously, that terrorist violence in Kenya has been facilitated by the influx of Somali refugees.



## **B. CASE II: ATTACK ON GARISSA CHURCHES ON JULY 1, 2012**

The attack by unidentified gunmen on Garissa churches probably signifies a different dimension in Kenya's demeanor of terrorist violence, which further suggests that a physical war of religions especially between Muslims and Christians could be imminent. In other countries, like the Central African Republic (CAR), this type of war is real and ongoing, whereby Christians are reportedly determined to eliminate Muslims permanently. The Northeastern part of Kenya is more likely to follow suit with Muslims taking an upper hand against Christians. Nonetheless, the author believes that this attack is a good case study for the theory and hypothesis of this research because the Garissa churches that were attacked on July 1, 2012, are located near Dadaab refugee camp. For instance, the gunmen involved in the deadly attacks in Garissa operated and behaved contrary to the conventional wisdom about most armed terrorists being Islamic militants. Unlike the Westgate mall attackers who reportedly endeavored to protect Muslims to minimize Muslim casualties, the gunmen who often target and terrorize communities in Northeastern Kenya exercise no discrimination based on religious affiliations of the targeted communities; both Muslim and non-Muslims are equally vulnerable. Ombati (2013, p. 1) further observes that a few months before the Garissa church attack, "At least seven villagers were killed when gunmen opened fire on worshippers in a mosque in a village near Liboi at the Kenya-Somalia border, about 25 kilometers from the Dadaab refugee camp."

The gunmen's unique behavior caused significant controversy amidst Kenyan security agencies that had initially attributed the church attacks to the Islamic militant group, Al-Shabaab. Interestingly, neither Al-Shabaab nor any other terrorist group has publicly claimed responsibility for the Garissa church attacks. Since 2007, the Northeastern part of Kenya has registered the highest count of fatal terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al-Shabaab. Local communities and government installations in Garissa County near the Dadaab refugee complex have been particularly vulnerable. Ombati (2013, p. 2) notes, "In the past year there have been over 40 attacks in Kenya involving grenades or explosive

devices, leaving at least 100 people dead, and around 220 injured. At least 15 of these attacks occurred in Northeastern province mainly in Dadaab, Wajir, and Garissa.” The refugee complex comprises at least five camps and makes Dadaab the largest refugee complex in Africa. As of February 2013, the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) reported that “three of the camps were operating well beyond their intended capacity; Ifol, Dagahley, and Hagader were intended for a total of 90,000 inhabitants, but are currently hosting approximately 450,000 refugees” (Ombati, 2013, p. 8).

### **1. Perpetration, Scale, and Impact of the Attack**

According to information provided by Kenyan security agencies and reports from several media organizations, the most probable perpetrator of the Garissa church attacks is Al-Shabaab. However, it is imperative to note that for most attacks, there has always been little or no conclusive evidence to officially accuse Al-Shabaab. Contrary to Al-Shabaab’s normal practice of claiming responsibility for high profile terrorist attacks, no particular group has claimed responsibility for the Garissa church attacks. According to the BBC’s news anchor in Nairobi, Mwachiro (2012, p. 2) reported that “No group has yet said it carried out the attacks, but the finger of blame will undoubtedly be pointed at Al-Shabaab or its sympathizers.”

The attacks on two different churches in Garissa on July 1, 2012, claimed 18 lives and injured at least 60 worshipers, and are by far the biggest and most fatal attacks in that part of Kenya since 2007. BBC News (2012, p. 1) reported that

Kenya’s North-Eastern Regional Police Chief mentioned that Garissa is the region’s provincial capital, at about 140km (90 miles) from the Somali border and it is close to Dadaab refugee camp where gunmen attacked the town’s Catholic church and African Inland Church (AIC), shot two policemen outside of the churches, and grenades were thrown inside. As the panicked congregation rushed to escape, gunmen fired on them.



Figure 8. Kenyan Map Showing Locations of Dadaab Refugee Complex and Town of Garissa (from AFP, 2012).

## **2. Empirical Evidence Relevant to Theory and Hypothesis**

Acts of terrorism, such as kidnapping of aid workers from refugee camps in Kenya and subsequently holding them hostage in Al-Shabaab controlled areas in Somalia, have confirmed that the hostage takers and the perpetrators of terrorist attacks on various targets of opportunity in Kenyan cities are indeed well linked and coordinated for cross-border operations. For the case of the Garissa attacks, it was easier for perpetrators to succeed in planning and executing their mission because of the cover and concealment provided by a vast Somali refugee populace and a predominantly Somali-Kenyan Muslim community in the Northeastern Province. The gunmen are believed to have utilized Dadaab refugee camp as a safe haven to reconnoiter and plot their targets clandestinely without detection by the Kenyan police. It is also worth mentioning that the Garissa church attacks were a “slap in the face” to Kenyan police and other security organs; hardly had the search operation for four aid workers kidnapped from Dadaab refugee camp commenced, before the attackers turned their guns and grenades on Christian churches in the vicinity of the refugee camp. To this end, Shephard (2012, p. 2) observed that

As the search continued in the nearby town of Garissa for four aid workers from Canada, Norway, and the Philippines, who were abducted by gunmen on Friday morning from the Dadaab refugee camp, masked assailants attacked churches with grenades and gunfire killing at least 15 worshippers and wounding dozens.

Approximately two years later, the investigations about the perpetrators of the Garissa church attacks continue; however, there seems to be no conclusive evidence on the actual identities of the gunmen. Almost all security and law enforcement agencies in East Africa suspect Al-Shabaab. It is imperative to observe that the church attacks in Garissa occurred immediately after “four aid workers from Canada, Norway, and the Philippines” were kidnapped at gunpoint from Dadaab refugee complex, and taken hostage in neighboring Somalia. Figure 9 shows a picture of the church scene immediately after the fatal attack.



Figure 9. Attack Scene inside African Inland Church in Garissa on July 1, 2012 (from NTV, 2012).

Moreover, the Kenyan media reported that after a brief but thorough investigation of the church attacks, Kenyan security analysts dismissed a possible connection of the gunmen to any terrorist group. Maina (2012, p. 1) reported that

Anti-terrorism investigators have ruled out the involvement of Al-Shabaab in the attacks on two churches in Garissa. They are now focusing on fresh leads that the attacks were motivated by either local tensions between Muslims and Christians or a politically motivated crime. The investigators reached that conclusion after analyzing four incidents in Garissa in the past six months. Figure 10 is a map of Kenya showing an approximation of the geographical location of the Garissa church attacks.



Figure 10. Location of Church Attacks in Garissa on July 1, 2012 (from Nation.com, 2012).

It seems likely that the investigations by the Kenyan police that downplayed the possibility of Al-Shabaab's involvement, omitted a significant aspect associated with the different tactical approach used by Al-Shabaab as means to achieve their ends. Indeed, the tactical approach of kidnapping and hostage taking is not new. For instance, before the International Joint Maritime Task Force intensified surveillance and maritime operations on the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Eden, pirates enjoyed limitless freedom of action on Somali coastal waters from where they occasionally hijacked commercial vessels and crews in exchange for ransom money, and a considerable portion of the ransom money financed Al-Shabaab's budget for recruitment, training, and arming of pirates. It is against this background that pirates who used to be agents and collaborators of Al-Shabaab, changed tactics from hijacking of commercial ships and crews to kidnapping of expatriate workers, foreign nationals, and tourists. Once piracy was no longer lucrative due to intervention and operationalization of the Joint Maritime Task Force on the Indian Ocean, the former pirates turned to kidnapping of targeted individuals mainly from insecure environs such as refugee camps. In a similar manner, Al-Shabaab agents disguise themselves as refugees for purposes of gaining direct proximity to targets and other targeting opportunities. Reed and Saul (2011, p. 3) noted that, "people are taken from the coast of Kenya and then facilitated all the way through Al-Shabaab held areas and delivered to an area held by pirates and negotiated by pirate gangs."

Even though these observations do not provide direct confirmation of the theory and hypothesis of this study, they are nevertheless suggestive. Moreover, the close timing and almost simultaneous occurrence of the Garissa church attacks and the kidnapping of aid workers from Dadaab refugee camp, provides firm ground for which the two terrorist incidents can be re-investigated concurrently. This is based on the insight that defunct piracy groups from the Somali coastal waters may have turned their focus to kidnapping and hostage taking of vulnerable and unsuspecting individuals for ransom money, just as the

pirates used to hijack commercial ships and crews before the pirates were denied freedom of action and subsequently defeated on the Indian Ocean.

### **C. CASE III: ATTACK ON A BUS IN EASTLEIGH SUBURB ON NOVEMBER 18, 2012**

The main mode of transportation to and from Eastleigh, a suburb on the outskirts of Nairobi city, is by minibus, popularly called 'matatus' in the local dialect. The majority of passengers who travel by minibus to and from Eastleigh are ethnic Somalis and Somali-Kenyans. The type of improvised explosive device (IED) that blew up the Eastleigh bus was most probably homemade, after which, the attackers smuggled it aboard the bus stealthily. Much of Eastleigh is a heavily-congested slum with many semi-permanent structures reminiscent of terrorists' safe havens for clandestine operations due to good cover and concealment. The author believes that the Eastleigh bus attack is a good case study because any empirical evidence about the attack is more likely to justify and support the theory and hypothesis of this research. Notably, Eastleigh is home to many Somali refugees who purportedly escape from refugee camps in pursuit of employment opportunities for better liveliness.

The Eastleigh suburb and its environs have registered the highest level of terrorist violence in Kenya since 2007. The suburb hosts a significant population of Somali immigrants and has gradually developed into an active business area; the main economic hub of diaspora Somalis who opt to invest their foreign exchange earnings and savings in Kenya. Mengo (2011, p. 2) attested that "the area is perhaps Nairobi's most active commercial center, slowly taking over from the central business district." For the past five years, the suburb has hosted increasing numbers of illegal and undocumented immigrants, mainly Somali refugees from refugee camps in the North-Eastern part of Kenya. The suburb lacks an adequate transport terminal for public service vehicles, which would facilitate security screening of passengers and their luggage. Figure 11 shows one of Eastleigh's public transportation terminals during a normal working day.





Figure 11. Eastleigh's Public Transportation Area (from Business Daily Africa, 2012).

### 1. Perpetration, Scale, and Impact of the Attack

The perpetrators of terrorist violence in Eastleigh are fond of hurling grenades, torching petrol bombs, indiscriminate arson, and detonation of home-made IEDs as a means to achieve their ends. START (2013, p. 2) attests that “Al-Shabaab’s most commonly used tactics include bombings and armed assaults, which comprise 72.6 percent of all the attacks.” The perpetrators of the bus attack reportedly detonated an IED on a public transportation bus resulting in the loss of at least ten lives and injuring thirty. START (2013, p. 2) further reported that “[n]o group claimed responsibility for the incident; however, one individual was taken into custody following the bombing.” The Kenyan police stormed Eastleigh suburb in pursuit of the attackers and evidence to apprehend any suspects, and to counter the deadly riots that erupted after the attack, culminating in widespread violence and looting of Somali owned businesses. “The Nairobi Police Chief urged Muslims and Christians in the area to resist attacking each other” (*Sabahi*, 2012, p. 2).



The Kenyan authorities have resolved to support and implement a strict and timely effort to crackdown on illegal immigrants, subsequently expediting the expatriation of mainly Somali refugees. However, some international humanitarian agencies have criticized Kenya's actions by alleging that massive human rights' violations and abuses have occurred. The Kenyan government has not officially responded to these allegations and criticisms, but it has locally defended its actions as necessary and sufficient internal security mechanisms to counter transnational terrorism and minimize terrorist violence, which is often orchestrated by illegal immigrants who disguise themselves as refugees and/or asylum seekers. To this end, HRW (2013b, p. 2) observed that

Somali and Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers who had lived for many years with their families in Eastleigh told Human Rights Watch that police rampaged through the suburb beginning on November 19, 2012, a day after identified people attacked a minibus, killing at least 7 people and injuring 30.

The tough actions by Kenya's law enforcement and security officials have strained the hitherto brotherly co-existence of ethnic Somalis, Somali-Kenyans, and indigenous Kenyans. The Somali communities claim that the strict measures adopted and implemented by Kenyan authorities, are based on ethnicity which may eventually culminate into ethnic profiling. These actions may compel some members of the affected communities to take risky and desperate decisions in an effort to deliberately avoid forced repatriation to Somalia. A prominent Somali-Kenyan businessman in Eastleigh voiced his concerns regarding the level of frustration, humiliation, and embarrassment that most Somalis have endured the tough actions undertaken by Kenyan officials. Raghavan (2013, p. 3) quoted the business man saying, "If authorities made a crackdown, arrested people, and tortured them; that will not help their cause because such actions might drive some Somalis to join Al-Shabaab."

The strategic concern of the Kenyan authorities is that some business proceeds from Eastleigh could be indirectly financing Al-Shabaab's transnational engagements. Raghavan (2013, p. 4) further noted that "Eastleigh according to

U.N and Kenyan officials as well as regional analysts, is a safe haven for Al-Shabaab operatives and an important source of recruitment and funding for the militia.” A significant number of Somali business owners claim that the profits from their businesses contribute to Kenya’s internal revenue, and support their jobless and impoverished relatives in Somalia. Nevertheless, the Kenyan authorities argue that much of the monetary profits from Eastleigh are neither monitored properly nor accounted for by Kenya’s internal revenue service.

## **2. Empirical Evidence Relevant to Theory and Hypothesis**

In the aftermath of the November 18, 2012, bus attack, Eastleigh was rocked with violent riots. The Kenyan police intervened promptly to halt the riots and take control of the situation. The police subsequently launched investigations to find any credible evidence that would facilitate apprehension of suspects. A report about the findings is not yet published, and no group has publicly claimed responsibility for the bus attack. However, based on situational and circumstantial evidence stemming from the violent riots that erupted after the attack, it appears likely that the attack was religiously inspired. Moreover, various media reports indicated that the riots were ethnically biased and religiously inspired with Muslims and Christians attacking each other.

However, firm conclusions about the attack are still difficult. The Kenyan police embarked on a massive investigation to find credible evidence that could link the attacks to the possible resurgence of an informal militia group and/or terrorist network in Eastleigh. The sole aim of the investigation was to establish if the perpetrators of the attacks were religiously inspired, politically motivated, and/or ethnically biased. Ramah (2012, p. 1) notes that

To get to the bottom of the recent terrorist attacks and find solutions to the problem, the government will form a ten-member investigation committee comprised of five government officials and five members drawn from the Eastleigh business community.

Figure 12 shows Eastleigh residents viewing a wreckage of the minibus after it was hit by an IED in the neighborhood of Kenya's capital, Nairobi, November 18, 2012.



Figure 12. The Scene of a Minibus Attack in Eastleigh, November 18, 2012 (from Reuters, 2012).

Notably the ten-member committee formed by the Kenyan government to investigate all terrorist attacks in Eastleigh has not published its official findings. Until the committee publishes its findings, the anticipated empirical evidence to support a causal connection between the November 18, 2012, bus attack and the hypothesis of this study may be hard to authenticate.

#### **D. CASE IV: ATTACK ON A NAIROBI BUS TERMINAL ON MARCH 10, 2012**

The Machakos bus terminal is Nairobi's busiest and handles a variety of human and vehicle traffic. Bus terminals are prone to terrorist attacks due to a variety of human traffic which transits through the terminals daily. For instance, many public bus terminals in Nairobi handle long fleets of regional traffic and huge volumes of cargo mainly to and from countries within the Great Lakes Region (GLR) of East and Central Africa. The March 10, 2012, attack on

Machakos reportedly claimed nine lives and wounded dozens of passengers. Since then similar attacks have occurred in other Kenyan cities, particularly in Mombasa. This attack is an interesting case study for this research because Machakos area hosts a considerable number of Somali-Kenyan businesses; more so, a majority of the regional buses that transit beyond Kenyan borders to neighboring countries, are owned and operated by Somalis.

The grenade attack on a crowded bus terminal at the heart of Nairobi's central business district shocked Kenya's internal security, counterterrorism, and law enforcement officials. Public transportation terminals and service vehicle boarding points are among the hot spots viewed as potential high value targets for terrorists. For Nairobi's central business district, extra caution is taken by the Kenyan police to ensure that the most vulnerable spots within public facilities are fully secured and routinely monitored to enforce and maximize security of person and property. The year of 2012 was by far the most violent in Kenya. Out of 155 attacks that occurred since 2007, 79 (51 percent) of them occurred in 2012 alone. The attack on a bus terminal was one of several other attacks that rocked Kenyan cities and the countryside, and which practically overwhelmed the Kenyan authorities. Based on the conventional wisdom drawn from Al-Shabaab's public and political propaganda, the attacks were deemed retaliatory and therefore attributed to Al-Shabaab. Notably, KDF had intervened in Southern Somalia barely five months before that Nairobi attack, and blame for the attack was geared towards the collaborators, sympathizers, and agents of East Africa's Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Shabaab.

### **1. Perpetration, Scale, and Impact of the Attack**

Unlike the November 18, 2012, minibus attack in Eastleigh, where an IED was detonated aboard, the attackers of an outdoor bus terminal in Nairobi unleashed grenades from a moving vehicle directly onto the target. This tactic used by the perpetrators to assault the target was reminiscent of the technique used by Al-Shabaab's mobile squad during a series of attacks on IDP camps in

Somalia in the fall of 2011. Even though no particular group publicly claimed responsibility for the Nairobi bus terminal attack, based on the author's operational experience in Somalia between May 2011 and May 2012, it appears highly probable that the perpetrators of the March 2012 Nairobi attack were Al-Shabaab operatives or its collaborators who might have had similar terrorist training and skills. Mokaya (2012, p. 1) reported that "four hand grenades were thrown from a passing vehicle into the Machakos bus station where people were either walking or standing waiting to board buses." Figure 13 shows a typical outdoor bus terminal in Nairobi city during daytime.



Figure 13. The Machakos Public Bus Station in Nairobi City (from *Sabahi*, 2012).

The perpetrators appear to have selected their target purposely to maximize the opportunity of widening the scale and impact of the attack, because almost all bus terminals in Nairobi city are regional in terms of passengers who transit through the bus terminals daily. The attack could have killed or injured non-Kenyan nationals from neighboring countries, as the majority of them frequently travel by road to and from Kenya for business, leisure, and tourism,

and they use the bus terminals as transit and boarding points. Aljazeera (2013, p. 2) reported that “nine people died and around 60 were injured in an attack on a Nairobi bus terminal, but Somalia’s Al-Shabaab rebel group denied involvement.”

It is also worth mentioning that the attack could have been directed at foreign tourists who at times travel publicly by road from Jomo Kenyatta International Airport or from the coastal towns on the Indian Ocean through Nairobi city to tourist destinations either within Kenya or in neighboring countries. Though the attack did not physically inflict high casualties, economically, it caused large negative impacts, such as a reduced influx of tourists and fewer passengers in the road transport sector due to fear and intimidation. On the other hand, from a security perspective, the attack had a positive impact by alerting Kenyan law enforcement agencies, internal security operatives, and counterterrorism officials to be more vigilant and assertive whilst on duty. The attack also impacted psychologically on residents of Nairobi city by imparting sudden fear and anxiety in their minds, by which they might gradually lose confidence and trust in the security agencies’ capacity to secure and safeguard East Africa’s main economic hub, the Kenyan capital.

## **2. Empirical Evidence Relevant to Theory and Hypothesis**

The fact that no attackers or possible suspects were apprehended instantly hampered any efforts to obtain credible evidence. However, the Kenyan police in collaboration with the East African Joint Counterterrorism Center (EAJCTC) launched a formal investigation to hunt down, and eventually arrest possible suspects or the actual attackers. It may not be possible to derive conclusive proof before the identities of the perpetrators are established and confirmed by the investigators. Nevertheless, publicly available information derived from situational and circumstantial evidence could still provide useful clues. For instance, if the attackers threw grenades from a moving vehicle, then data records on ownership, movements, maintenance, and registration of that vehicle could provide guiding clues to the attackers’ identities. However, in most

cases, vehicles used by terrorists and high-profile criminals are usually stolen from the registered owners, used to transport the attackers/criminals, and discarded immediately or even burnt to ashes after the attacks to destroy any evidence.

Even though some suspects were apprehended a couple of days after the attack, no reliable information was obtained from them to provide any conclusive evidence on the actual perpetrators of the attack. Mokaya (2012, p. 1) noted that “Kenya’s anti-terror police unit arrested four suspects in connection with Saturday’s grenade attack in Nairobi.” Based on past operational experience of similar attacks by Al-Shabaab fighters in Mogadishu Somalia, in 2011, the author observes that it is neither easy nor common to identify terrorists who tactically assault selected targets using the hit and run technique. More so, for the Nairobi bus terminal attack, where the target itself could easily conceal the attackers because of congested human and vehicle traffic in and around the target. The attackers easily diffused into the traffic congestion, and made it difficult for police to identify and track them immediately after the attack. Such a scenario normally frustrates any effort to obtain credible evidence. Figure 14 shows Kenyan police and security operatives piecing together any possible pieces of evidence from one of the casualties of the attack.





Figure 14. Kenyan Police and Security Officials Handling a Casualty  
(from AP, 2011).

For this case study, the author was not able to derive the necessary empirical evidence to conclusively support a causal connection between the bus terminal attack and the research hypothesis. If the Kenyan police can produce an investigation report on this particular incident, then similar or related research in future may find credible and useful information and derive the anticipated empirical evidence to support a similar or related theory and hypothesis.



## **IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This thesis explored the trends in transnational terrorism in East Africa, observing that it increased mainly in Kenya compared to other countries since 2010, and it remains a potential threat to the security and stability of the entire region. The study utilized publicly available data since 1998 for Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, derived from the Global Terrorism Data Base. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that countries that contribute troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) are most vulnerable to retaliatory terrorist attacks from Al-Shabaab, the study found that Kenya experienced the highest level of terrorist violence. Nevertheless, Burundi, Uganda, and Ethiopia contributed more troops to AMISOM than Kenya, but they have encountered comparably fewer terrorist attacks since in the same period.

### **A. CONCLUSION**

This study sought to explain this empirical puzzle through an investigation of the hypothesis that the heavy influx of Somali refugees was the key independent variable that drove Kenya to experience such a rapid increase in terrorist violence, relative to her neighbors. The evidence presented in this study lends substantial credence to this hypothesis. Case studies drawn from some of the largest attacks observed in Kenya during this period, at the Westgate shopping mall, Garissa churches, Eastleigh suburb, and the Nairobi bus terminal show that terrorist networks take advantage of refugee communities for recruitment, radicalization, and training of terrorists. Refugee camps in Kenya are used as safe havens for terrorists' operations and planning, from where Al-Shabaab operatives clandestinely reconnoiter and plot desired targets. These camps also provide terrorists proximity to targets and good targeting opportunities for high value and selected targets. It is also important to note that several other factors could have contributed to increased terrorist violence in Kenya; however, such factors could not be directly assessed in this study. These

factors include political repression, socio-economic disorder, competition for scarce resources, ignorance, poverty, ethnicity, sectarianism, and disharmony between Christians and Muslims. Further research will be needed in the future to consider such possibilities.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the analysis presented in this study, the author makes the following recommendations for future policies:

1. The Kenyan government should work closely with the United Nations Humanitarian Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to minimize illegal immigration and uncontrollable influx of Somali refugees.
2. Other East African countries are urged to derive lessons from Kenya's situation to adopt and implement strategic initiatives for handling and management of refugee communities appropriately, to curtail and deter terrorist infiltration in refugee camps.
3. The UNHCR should adopt a policy based on specific timelines by which repatriation of refugees back to their countries should be emphasized and prioritized depending on the security and political conditions in those countries.
4. The Kenyan government should formulate policies and possibly enact new laws and legislation to fully integrate Somali-Kenyans into Kenyan society, to eradicate sectarianism, ethnic profiling, and discrepancy between Christians and Muslims.
5. The East African Joint Counter-Terrorism Center (EAJCTC) based in Nairobi should be fully embraced and supported by all East African Community (EAC) member countries. Regional counterterrorism initiatives and strategies supported by international partners in the Global War on Terror should be strengthened and operationalized.
6. Enhance regional collaboration and continuous capacity building amongst regional security and intelligence agencies, to facilitate information sharing and the development of technical capabilities to detect and thwart potential terrorist threats, while also coordinating joint and rapid responses to terrorist attacks.

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